

A Woman Scientist: the Life of E.K. Janaki Ammal 1897-1984



October 2016 – October 2017
BSI Gallery of Indian Museum,
Kolkata

General becoming a key national scientist.

Throughout her career she faced constant challenges from the scientific community both in India and abroad because of her caste, race and gender. Her story is therefore an important one and an inspiring example for young scientists visiting the museum.

The exhibition was curated by Vinita Damodaran and Laharee Mitra and draws on her letters and photographs. Her published papers also form part of the exhibition which has had a lot of press coverage in the Indian media. Since January, the Centre of World

Environmental History at the University of Sussex has been conducting school visits for Kolkata middle schools to the exhibitions at the Indian Museum. This display has proved very popular with the students, who had previously been unaware of this singular figure in India's own scientific history and heritage.

The Janaki Ammal exhibition, Janaki Ammal offers a poignant counterpart to Joseph Hooker and a long list of other British male naturalists who have historically dominated Indian natural history. While the work of these naturalists is undeniably important to Indian heritage, as a post-colonial woman Janaki Ammal is able to offer a more Indian-focused perspective

Born in 1897, Janaki Ammal is a crucial figure in the history of science in India, whose numerous publications including in *Nature* in 1938 and her jointly authored publication with C.D. Darlington, the *Chromosome Atlas of cultivated plants* (1945) received substantial attention. Receiving a PhD in Botany in 1931, she became the first Indian woman to ever achieve this honour and subsequently went on to work at the Sugarcane Breeding Institute in Coimbatore, the John Innes Institute, where she formed associations with geneticists C.D. Darlington and J.B.S. Haldane, and other scientists in the Royal Horticultural Society. While in the UK, she became known as an expert in cytology and was frequently consulted by scientists from RHS and Kew to analyse newly discovered plant species. In 1951, she was appointed by Jawaharlal Nehru to reorganise the BSI, first as an Officer, then as the Director

